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Ekalavya Model Residential Schools and the Education of Scheduled Tribes: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India continue to experience significant educational disadvantages due to geographical isolation, socio-economic marginalization, and inadequate schooling infrastructure. To address these disparities, the Government of India has introduced initiatives such as SSA, RMSA, and the RTE Act (2009), with the Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), launched in 1997–98, emerging as a major intervention to provide free, residential, and culturally responsive education for tribal learners. This study examines the contribution of EMRS to the educational advancement of Scheduled Tribes and assesses its effectiveness, persistent challenges, and policy implications. A systematic literature review was conducted by synthesizing studies published between 2015 and 2025. Relevant literature was identified through Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Sage Publications, government websites, and reputable news sources, using clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings of the review indicate that EMRS has enhanced educational access, literacy outcomes, and student retention among tribal learners; however, ongoing constraints such as infrastructural inadequacies, shortages of qualified teachers, limited career guidance, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms continue to affect institutional performance. The review recommends strengthening teacher preparation, upgrading infrastructure, expanding vocational and skill-based programs, integrating culturally relevant curricula, and improving administrative management to align EMRS with national education standards and enhance learning opportunities for Scheduled Tribe students.

Keywords: Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, Scheduled Tribes Education, Tribal Schooling, Educational Access, Systematic Literature Review.

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Introduction

Scheduled Tribes (STs) are indigenous communities recognized under Article 366(25) of the Indian Constitution, characterised by distinct cultural identities, socio-economic marginalisation, and geographical isolation (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022). According to the Census of India (2011), STs constitute 8.6% of the total population, with large concentrations residing in remote, hilly, and forested regions.

Despite constitutional safeguards such as Article 15(4) and the Right to Education Act (2009), Scheduled Tribes continue to face persistent educational challenges, including high dropout rates, inadequate infrastructure, language barriers, and the impact of seasonal migration (NITI Aayog, 2021; Singh & Sharma, 2020). Schools in tribal areas frequently experience shortages of trained teachers, poor connectivity, and culturally misaligned curricula, further widening the educational gap between ST learners and other social groups (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). Language constraints also affect student retention, as many tribal children speak indigenous languages at home while schooling is predominantly conducted in regional or national languages (Mohanty, 2019).

Economic hardship further compels many tribal children to participate in labour or migrate seasonally with their families, making regular school attendance difficult (Bose, 2012). Gender disparity remains a significant concern, with tribal girls often facing early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and social restrictions that limit their educational opportunities (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2018). Additionally, experiences of discrimination and cultural alienation in mainstream educational settings continue to discourage ST students from fully engaging with formal schooling (Singh, 2013).

Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)

Recognising these educational disparities, the Government of India has introduced several initiatives to enhance educational access and equity for Scheduled Tribes. The Right to Education Act (2009), the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) have focused on improving tribal education by promoting universal enrolment and strengthening school infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2019).

One of the most significant initiatives targeted at tribal education is the Eklavya

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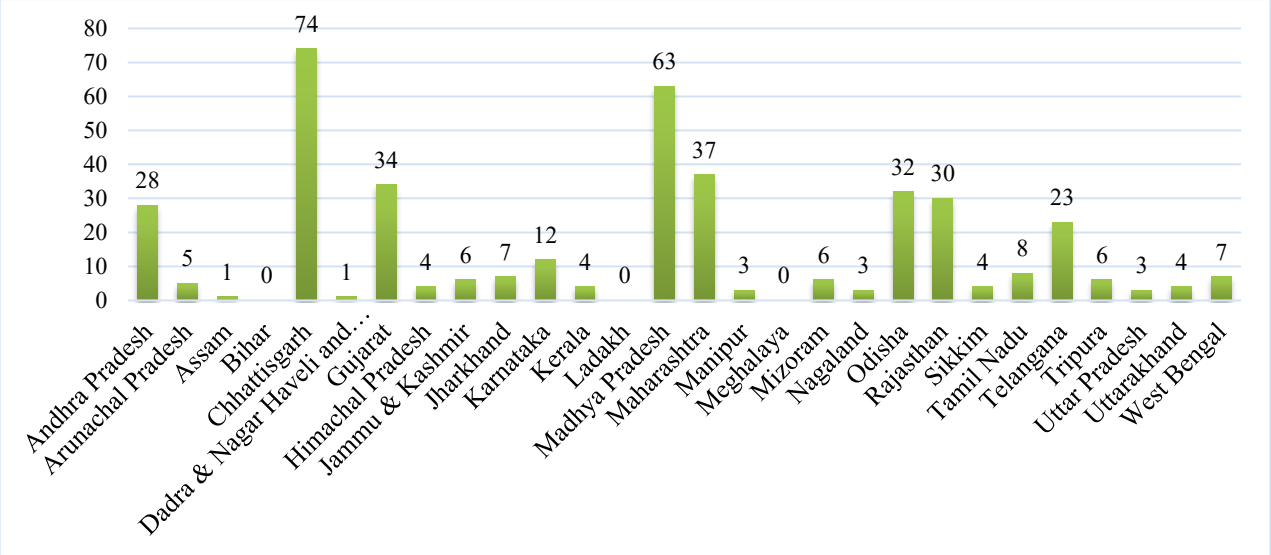
Model Residential Schools (EMRS), introduced in 1997 under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA). These fully funded residential institutions provide free, quality education from Grades 6 to 12 for Scheduled Tribe students (MoTA, 2022). EMRS aims to increase enrolment, improve retention, and enhance academic performance among tribal learners while integrating tribal culture, language, and traditional knowledge into mainstream schooling. The Union Budget 2018 further expanded the initiative by setting a mandate to establish one EMRS in every block with at least 50 per cent tribal population and 20,000 tribal individuals (Government of India, 2018).

EMRS institutions place strong emphasis on academic excellence, extracurricular development, and vocational training to ensure holistic learning experiences. These schools follow the CBSE curriculum, providing students with competitive exposure for higher education and career opportunities (Kumar & Rani, 2020). Additionally, STEM education, digital learning initiatives, and skill-based programmes have been introduced to strengthen technological proficiency and employability among tribal students (MoTA, 2022).

Figure 1

State/UT wise total number of EMRS functional in Indi



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Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2024, August 7). *Over 1.23 lakh students enrolled in Eklavya Model Residential Schools in 2023-24; 405 EMRSs functional across the country.* Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Retrieved from https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2042570

However, despite these efforts, several challenges persist in the implementation and effectiveness of EMRS. Issues such as infrastructural deficits, shortages of trained teachers, and the need for culturally inclusive pedagogy have been widely noted (Das & Mohanty, 2021). For migratory tribal communities such as the Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring continuity of education poses an additional challenge, as families relocate seasonally in pursuit of livelihood opportunities (Sharma, 2023).

EMRS in Promoting Tribal Education

Despite the expansion of EMRS and other educational initiatives, educational disparities among Scheduled Tribes continue to persist, necessitating a critical examination of the role of EMRS in addressing these challenges (Mishra & Pattnaik, 2020). This literature review is significant as it evaluates the effectiveness, challenges, and long-term impact of EMRS in promoting educational inclusion and socio-economic empowerment among Scheduled Tribes.

By analysing existing research and policy documents, this paper seeks to identify best practices, existing gaps, and areas requiring improvement in the implementation of EMRS. The review also explores policy implications for strengthening tribal education frameworks, particularly in regions characterised by high levels of seasonal migration. Furthermore, the findings from this study aim to contribute to evidence-based policymaking and offer recommendations to enhance the accessibility, quality, and sustainability of EMRS for Scheduled Tribes in India.

Objectives

- To know the role of EMRS in improving educational access for Scheduled Tribes.
- To identify gaps in existing research and suggest future directions.

Based on these objectives, the following research questions were formulated.

Research Questions

- How do Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) contribute to

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improving educational access for Scheduled Tribe students in India?

- What gaps exist in the current research on EMRS, and what directions can be recommended for future studies?

Methodology

The present study adopts a systematic literature review approach to examine the role and effectiveness of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in promoting the education of Scheduled Tribes in India. The review followed a structured process of identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant studies published between 2015 and 2025. Various academic and grey literature sources were searched, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Sage Publications, government websites, and reputable news articles.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the relevance and quality of selected studies. Inclusion criteria involved research published within the specified period, studies focused on EMRS or tribal education, and empirical or policy-based papers available in English. Exclusion criteria included non-academic content, studies outside the timeframe, and papers not directly related to EMRS or Scheduled Tribe education. After the screening process, 12 studies were finally selected for detailed analysis.

Review of Related Literature

The Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) initiative has played a crucial role in enhancing educational accessibility for Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, contributing to improvements in literacy rates, skill development, and overall academic performance (Arun & Premkumar, 2020; Halder & Guha, 2023). Studies indicate that EMRS institutions located in remote regions often outperform other government schools in terms of enrolment and student retention, with many parents' expressing satisfaction regarding the quality of education provided (Halder & Guha, 2023). However, despite these achievements, substantial challenges persist in infrastructure development, teacher availability, and funding allocations, highlighting the need for urgent policy interventions to ensure sustained progress (Kumar & Rani, 2020; Biswal & Dansana, 2021).

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One major concern highlighted in the literature is the disparity in teaching–learning processes between EMRS and other residential schooling models, such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV). Research reveals that teaching methods and lesson planning in several EMRS institutions are often less structured, resulting in lower student engagement and limited integration of technology in classroom instruction (Dash, 2018). Additionally, the lack of comprehensive career counselling and vocational training programmes restricts students' ability to make informed career choices and effectively transition into higher education and employment opportunities (Sharma, 2023; Mohapatra, 2019).

Infrastructure remains another critical area requiring improvement. Although many EMRS conform to government guidelines by providing classrooms, hostels, libraries, and sports facilities, studies report concerns regarding inadequate teacher supervision, inconsistent access to safe drinking water, and shortages of essential hostel supplies (Biswal & Dansana, 2021). Furthermore, nearly 45 per cent of sanctioned EMRS remain non-functional, raising serious concerns about the pace of implementation and the overall effectiveness of the policy framework in ensuring nationwide access to quality education for tribal students (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022).

The shortage of trained educators and the limited use of culturally inclusive pedagogical practices further exacerbate the challenges faced by EMRS institutions. While EMRS has contributed significantly to academic growth and cultural heritage preservation, research indicates a persistent gap in teacher training and in the adaptation of curricula to the specific learning needs of tribal students (Pandey & Kakati, 2022). Gender disparities also remain evident, with female students facing limited exposure to higher education pathways and restricted awareness of employment opportunities (Pandey & Kakati, 2022).

Despite these shortcomings, government investments have led to notable improvements in tribal education, reflected in increased literacy rates and greater academic participation among ST learners (Negi & Dutta, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2021). However, studies emphasise that although enrolment in EMRS is rising, transition rates to higher

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education remain relatively low, indicating the need for stronger academic mentoring, more robust scholarship facilitation, and better post-secondary support systems (NITI Aayog, 2021; Mohapatra, 2019).

Given these findings, scholars underline the urgent need for enhanced funding, improved monitoring mechanisms, and strategic structural reforms to bring EMRS on par with high-performing models such as Navodaya Vidyalayas (Geddam, 2015). Recommendations include strengthening teacher recruitment and training, upgrading infrastructure, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and integrating culturally responsive pedagogies to address the diverse learning needs of Scheduled Tribe students (Kumar & Rani, 2020; Biswal & Dansana, 2021). With sustained policy attention and evidence-based interventions, EMRS holds significant potential to bridge educational disparities, foster socio-economic mobility, and create equitable educational opportunities for Scheduled Tribe learners across India.

Year	Author(s)	Title
2023	Halder & Guha	*"Educational Status of Tribal Learners: A Case Study of EMRS in West Bengal"*
2023	Negi & Dutta	*"Development Initiatives and Tribal Education in India*
2023	Sharma	*Educational Attainment and Aspirations among Tribal Youth: A Case for EMRS"*
2022	Ministry of Tribal Affairs	*Eklavya Model Residential Schools: Status Report*
2022	Pandey & Kakati	*"Empowering Tribal Education: Insights from Eklavya Model Residential Schools in Sixth Scheduled States of India"*
2021	NITI Aayog	*"State of Education in India: Focus on Tribal Development"*
2021	Biswal & Dansana	*"Functioning of Eklavya Model Residential School, Rayagada, Odisha"*
2020	Arun & Premkumar	*"Transformation in Tribal Education: A Study of Eklavya Model Residential Schools"*

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2020	Kumar & Rani	*"Bridging Educational Gaps: The Role of EMRS in Tribal Development"*
2019	Mohapatra	*"Impact Evaluation of the Scheme of National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Students"*
2018	Dash	*"Teaching-Learning Process for Tribal Students in Eklavya Model Residential Schools and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in Odisha: An Evaluative Study"*
2015	Geddam	*"A Study on Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in Tribal Education"*

Key Findings from the Review of Related Literature

- EMRS has improved educational access for Scheduled Tribes, contributing to higher literacy rates, skill development, and enhanced academic performance (Arun & Premkumar, 2020; Halder & Guha, 2023).
- EMRS institutions located in remote regions perform better than other government schools, particularly in enrolment, student retention, and parental satisfaction with the quality of education (Halder & Guha, 2023).
- Persistent challenges related to infrastructure, teacher availability, and funding highlight the need for urgent policy attention to sustain improvements in tribal education (Kumar & Rani, 2020; Biswal & Dansana, 2021).
- Teaching–learning processes in many EMRS are less structured compared to Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs), resulting in lower student engagement and limited integration of technology in classroom instruction (Dash, 2018).
- Career counselling and vocational training remain inadequate, restricting students' capacity to make informed career decisions and successfully transition into higher

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education and employment (Sharma, 2023; Mohapatra, 2019).

- Infrastructure-related issues—such as inadequate teacher supervision, inconsistent access to safe drinking water, and shortages of essential hostel supplies—continue to affect students' learning environments (Biswal & Dansana, 2021).
- Nearly 45% of sanctioned EMRS remain non-functional, raising concerns about implementation speed, policy execution, and nationwide access to quality education for Scheduled Tribes (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022).
- A shortage of trained educators and limited use of culturally relevant pedagogical practices remain critical gaps, directly affecting effective learning among tribal students (Pandey & Kakati, 2022).
- Gender disparities persist, with female students reporting limited awareness and reduced access to higher education pathways and employment opportunities (Pandey & Kakati, 2022).
- Despite increased government investment, transition rates to higher education remain low, underscoring the need for improved academic mentoring, stronger scholarship mechanisms, and more defined post-secondary pathways (Negi & Dutta, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2021).
- Scholars emphasise the need for enhanced funding, stronger monitoring systems, and structural reforms to elevate EMRS to the standards of high-performing institutions such as Navodaya Vidyalayas (Geddam, 2015).

Discussion

The review shows that EMRS has contributed meaningfully to improving educational access and academic outcomes for Scheduled Tribe students. Higher enrolment, better retention, and increased literacy levels indicate that the residential schooling model has helped reduce barriers related to distance, migration, and socio-economic constraints. Parental satisfaction

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reported in several studies further reflects growing trust in EMRS as a reliable educational option for tribal learners.

At the same time, the review highlights several challenges that limit the full effectiveness of EMRS. Infrastructure deficits, shortages of trained teachers, and gaps in supervision continue to affect schooling quality. The fact that nearly 45 per cent of sanctioned schools remain non-functional raises concerns about implementation efficiency and uneven access across states. Teaching–learning processes in many EMRS are also found to be less structured than in models such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), with limited use of digital tools and weak lesson planning practices. Inadequate career counselling and vocational support further restrict students' preparedness for higher education and employment.

Gender disparities also remain visible, especially in career awareness and aspirations among female students. Although government investments have strengthened school-level participation, low transition rates to higher education suggest the need for stronger academic mentoring and better post-secondary pathways for tribal youth.

Overall, related literature shows that EMRS has played an important role in improving educational opportunities for Scheduled Tribe students, yet several gaps remain. Challenges related to infrastructure, teacher preparation, and culturally relevant pedagogy continue to affect educational quality. These issues highlight the need for a systematic review to consolidate existing evidence and suggest informed policy measures to strengthen the EMRS model for tribal learners.

Conclusion

This review shows that Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) have played a meaningful role in improving educational access and participation among Scheduled Tribe students by reducing barriers related to distance, socio-economic constraints, and seasonal migration, which has led to better enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes. At the same time, persistent challenges such as infrastructure gaps, shortages of trained teachers, limited culturally responsive pedagogy, insufficient career guidance, and

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low transition rates to higher education continue to restrict the full effectiveness of EMRS. Comparisons with stronger residential models, particularly Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, further highlight the need for more structured academic planning, effective teaching–learning processes, and improved resource allocation. Overall, while EMRS remains a promising initiative for strengthening tribal education, its long-term impact will depend on sustained policy attention and targeted reforms in teacher preparation, infrastructure development, culturally relevant curriculum, and monitoring systems to ensure equitable, high-quality educational opportunities for Scheduled Tribe communities.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Improving EMRS

- **Ensure Full Functionality of Sanctioned EMRS:** Immediate efforts are needed to operationalise the remaining 45% of EMRS that are still non-functional, as this will significantly expand educational access for Scheduled Tribe students.
- **Strengthen Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Specialised and ongoing training programmes should be introduced to equip teachers with competencies in tribal education, cultural inclusivity, multilingual instruction, and modern pedagogical methods.
- **Improve Teacher Recruitment and Retention:** Recruitment strategies should prioritise qualified teachers for remote tribal areas, accompanied by appropriate incentives, housing facilities, and opportunities for career advancement to ensure long-term retention.
- **Promote Structured and Interactive Teaching–Learning Processes:** EMRS should adopt well-designed lesson plans, activity-based pedagogy, and digital learning tools to enhance student engagement and improve academic performance.
- **Enhance Career Counselling and Vocational Guidance:** Each EMRS should establish a career guidance unit to support students in accessing higher education, scholarships, and employment opportunities. Expanded

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vocational and skill-based programmes are essential for improving employability.

- **Upgrade Infrastructure and Basic Facilities:** Schools should ensure reliable access to clean drinking water, functional hostels, adequate study materials, safe learning environments, and well-maintained classrooms to support student well-being.
- **Increase Government Funding and Strengthen Fiscal Monitoring:** Adequate funding and systematic monitoring mechanisms are necessary to ensure that EMRS receive sufficient resources and that funds are utilised effectively within institutions.
- **Align EMRS with Navodaya Vidyalaya Standards:** EMRS should incorporate best practices from Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs), including academic rigour, structured pedagogy, and preparation for competitive examinations.
- **Support Transition to Higher Education:** Stronger transition pathways are needed through university partnerships, entrance exam coaching, mentorship programmes, and financial aid support to help students pursue higher education beyond EMRS.
- **Develop a Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** Regular assessments, audits, and outcome-based evaluations should be carried out to track institutional performance, identify gaps, and ensure continuous improvements in educational quality.

By implementing these recommendations, EMRS can evolve into a stronger and more effective educational model that empowers tribal students and supports their long-term academic progress and career advancement.

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